

# **Carson-Iceberg**

*NV-030-532*

CARSON-ICEBERG WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(NV-030-532)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 550 acres

The Carson-Iceberg WSA lies in Alpine County near the middle of the eastern edge of California, approximately 30 miles southeast of South Lake Tahoe and 90 miles east of Sacramento. The WSA includes 550 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and no State land or private inholdings (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the west and south sides by the Toiyabe National Forest/Carson Iceberg Wilderness, on the north and southeast sides by private lands, and on the northeast by an unpaved road on BLM land.

The WSA comprises a mixed coniferous forest on both sides of the East Fork of the Carson River in the Eastern Sierra Nevada. The river flows northerly through a rugged, winding canyon for one-and-a-half miles in the WSA. The meadows of Silver King Valley flank the WSA to the east at an elevation of 6,400 feet, while the 7,000-foot western side of the WSA is surrounded by higher elevation coniferous forest in the 154,000-acre U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wilderness. Landscape character inside the WSA is very similar to that in the adjacent wilderness.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environment Impact Statements (EIS) for the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE --- 550 acres recommended  
for wilderness  
0 BLM acres recommended  
for non-wilderness

All wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term.

The rationale for the all-wilderness recommendation is that the outstanding wilderness characteristics in the entire WSA are similar to those in the surrounding 154,000-acre Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. Currently the main land use in the WSA is primitive recreation associated with the existing wilderness. All other land uses in the WSA are compatible with wilderness.

The free-flowing East Fork of the Carson River flows through one and a half miles of winding, rugged, forested canyon. The Toiyabe National Forest has determined the clear, clean stream to be eligible for wild river designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Designation of the WSA would increase the manageability of the existing Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. The USFS constructed the Carson River Trail through the middle of the WSA, roughly parallel to the river, to provide a major access route to the wilderness backcountry. This trail provides the primary public access to the WSA two miles in from the trailhead at Wolf Creek Meadows; the road in Silver King Valley is closed to the general public at Highway 89 five miles north of the WSA. Views of the river and the wilderness high-country are available along the trail.

The proposed wilderness is vegetated with mixed coniferous forest which varies greatly in composition and appearance according to site characteristics. A narrow riparian zone, including meadows, flanks the river. Fish and wildlife abound.

The imprint of man's work is substantially unnoticeable throughout the unit, even along the modest man-made trail. Timber, ridges, and steep canyons isolate the visitor from outside sights and sounds and from other wilderness users. Sites suitable for camping, fishing, and exploring are numerous off the trail even within the small acreage of the WSA.



TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	550
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		550
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	550
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		550
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	0
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		0

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The Carson-Iceberg WSA is natural in character; long-term biological and physical processes of environmental cause and effect are operating intact. The imprint of man's work is substantially unnoticeable throughout the unit.

The river flows freely, without man-made obstruction or channel alteration. Terrain varies from gently rolling and level sites to steep slopes and large rock outcroppings in the canyon. The land surface is undisturbed by man. USFS trail maintenance is typical for a wilderness hiking and pack trail and does not detract from the appearance of naturalness.

Vegetation and wildlife in the WSA appear very diverse and natural. Slight to moderate forage utilization by livestock has not degraded vegetation, and the trend of range condition is upward. No range improvements exist, and none are needed now or in the future. Scattered decaying tree stumps are the only ready indications of historic logging. Second growth forest has returned to a natural appearance, and many trees are mature. The few stumps visible from the trail constitute a slight impact and contribute cultural interest.

2. Solitude: Even for its small size, the WSA provides considerable opportunities for solitude, due to screening by dense forest cover and irregular topography. It is possible to hike or ride cross-country or on the trail and only briefly see other people who may be present in the WSA. Meadows along the east fork of the Carson River and the forested ridge east of the river contain numerous small, secluded sites where visitors can find solitude from the main trail.

The USFS rerouted the Carson River Trail through the WSA because the new route offers solitude from developments and motorized vehicle use, to which the old route in Silver King Valley exposed wilderness travelers. Routing the trail through the WSA enables wilderness users to travel through the much larger Carson-Iceberg Wilderness without the former interruptions of the wilderness experience.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Opportunities for primitive dispersed recreation include hiking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, camping, and photography.

The predominant recreational activity in the WSA is travel by foot and horseback between the Wolf Creek Trailhead and many other sites in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness at the estimated rate of 400 visitor-days per year. Thus the WSA provides access to still greater opportunities for primitive, unconfined recreation, including mountain climbing and long-distance wilderness travel.

4. Special features: The most distinct and noteworthy feature in the WSA is the east fork of the Carson River flowing freely through timbered canyon slopes. The river contributes in large measure to the scenic, natural, and recreational values in the area. While the headwaters of the river are within the USFS wilderness, private land inholdings occur along the river. Presently, however, there are no developed water uses or conflicts.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 550 acres of the Sierran Forest/Mixed Conifer Forest ecosystem. While wilderness designation of this WSA would not add an entirely new ecosystem to the NWPS, it would further strengthen the protection which wilderness designation already provides to ecosystems in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. The WSA is typical of the Sierran Forest Province mixed conifer forest and adjacent to the higher elevation lodgepole pine-subalpine forest.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Mixed Conifer Forest	26	1,772,907	13	148,363
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Mixed Conifer Forest	26	1,772,907	1	5,382

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of 10 major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number of acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	<u>NWPS areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Rosa-Petaluma	10	888,579	12	134,167
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Yuba City	44	4,951,805	85	2,459,500
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	175	6,904,809

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There are no other BLM WSAs within 50 air miles recommended for wilderness designation. The Granite Chief (Tahoe National Forest), Desolation (Eldorado NF), and Mokelumne (Eldorado NF) Wilderness Areas are located approximately 50, 30, and 15 miles respectively northwest of the WSA. The Carson-Iceberg Wilderness (Toiyabe NF) is adjacent to the south, east, and west of the WSA. The Emigrant (Stanislaus NF), Hoover (Toiyabe NF), and Yosemite (Yosemite National Park) Wilderness Areas are located about 20, 25, and 35 miles, respectively, toward the south of the WSA.

#### C. Manageability

The area is manageable as wilderness. The means of managing it as wilderness are already in place by virtue of the current USFS management program for the Carson Iceberg Wilderness, and designation would increase the manageability of the existing wilderness. The USFS already maintains the trail it made through the WSA and patrols the wilderness along the trail on both sides of the WSA. This trail provides the primary public access to the WSA via a two-mile hike or ride through existing wilderness. The road to Silver King Valley is closed to the general public at Highway 89 five miles north of the WSA. No conflicting uses occur within the area.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.



D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at the time of the preliminary suitability recommendation: The energy and minerals potential of the Carson-Iceberg WSA is addressed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas. The EIS indicates that Tertiary volcanics underlie approximately 90 percent of the WSA. The geology does not indicate the presence of oil and gas or geothermal resources, and the potential for economic deposits of leasable minerals is low. No unique salable minerals are present. While the andesitic breccias, tuffs, and flows would generally be suitable for native borrow or fill applications, there is no anticipated market near the area and thus no value for salable mineral materials.

There were no mining claims in the WSA as of January, 1988. Some mining claims and mineral discoveries exist just a few miles outside the WSA in the same rock type. There are no known economic deposits of locatable minerals within the WSA, however, and the potential appears to be low to moderate.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: Some mining claims and mineral discoveries exist just a few miles outside the WSA in the same rock type. There are no known economic deposits of locatable minerals within the WSA. In 1988, the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Bureau of Mines published Open-File Report 88-273 on the mineral resources in the study area, based on 1987 mineral surveys. The report concludes, "No resources were identified in the study area, but the results of these surveys indicate that the area has low resource potential for gold in placer deposits and for silver in epithermal type deposits." According to BLM records, there were no unpatented mining claims, mineral sales or leases in the WSA as of January, 1988. Because of low potential for mineral resources, no mineral potential map was prepared for this document.

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas.)

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (All-WILDERNESS)	NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness designation of the Carson-Iceberg WSA will result in a slight positive benefit for wilderness values. Long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts will be provided. An increase of approximately 309 visitor-days of non-motorized recreation use for a total of 824 visitor-days will have a negligible impact on opportunities for solitude within the vicinity of the Carson Diver Trail. Livestock grazing use will continue at the existing 50 AUMs with no change in wilderness values anticipated.	There would be no significant impacts to wilderness values since there would be no projected surface-disturbing activities within the WSA, including motorized recreation use, timber harvest, and mineral development. An increase of approximately 309 visitor-days of nonmotorized recreation use would have a negligible impact on opportunities for solitude. Continued livestock grazing use of 50 AUMs would not result in any anticipated change in wilderness values.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Several comments were received during the wilderness inventory phase. Four, including one from the Alpine County Board of Supervisors, stated that the unit did not meet the inventory criteria because it contained less than 5,000 acres. Thirteen others supported the Bureau's position that the unit contained wilderness characteristics and noted that it was adjacent to a proposed USFS wilderness.

During the wilderness study phase, the Bureau held a public hearing in Bakersfield, California, and accepted written comments until February 15, 1988. No one submitted comments specific to this WSA.

The BOM submitted the only comment relative to the WSA, pointing out that an absence of mining claims does not conclusively prove a lack of significant economic mineral or energy resources. No other Federal, State, or County agency comments were received specific to the WSA.